

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SAB-01 EB-11 COME-00 TRSE-00 CIAE-00

DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR -10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04

RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20 USIA-15* DRC -01 /111 W

* -----?- 103444

R 271729Z DEC 73

FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9388

INFO GOV PANCANAL

USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 6870

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PN PQ PFOR

SUBJ: CANAL TOLL INCREASE: PANAMANIAN REACTION

REF: PANAMA 6721

SUMMARY. PUBLIC REACTION TO THE PROPOSED TOLL INCREASE HAS BEEN LIMITED TO FACTUAL COVERAGE IN THE NEWSPAPERS WITH SOME CRITICAL COMMENT BY COLUMNISTS. GOP OFFICIALS HAVE REFRAINED FROM COMMENTING ON THE ISSUE IN PUBLIC, BUT WILL PROBABLY FEEL IT NECESSARY TO AKE A PUBLIC POSITION SOMETIME PRIOR TO THE FINAL APPROVAL OF THE INCREASE. END SUMMARY.

1. PANAMANIAN PUBLIC REACTION TO THE DECISION OF THE BOARD OF THE PANAMA CANAL COMPANY TO PROPOSAL OF A TOLL INCREASE HAS BEEN LIMITED TO FAIRLY STRAIGHT TREATMENT IN THE NEWSPAPERS. ALL NEWSPAPERS GAVE THE INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT FRONT PAGE COVERAGE.

2. ALTHOUGH FOREIGN MINISTER TACK INFORMALLY PROTESTED THE FACT THAT SUCH DECISIONS WERE TAKEN WITHOUT CONSULTATION R REFERENCE TO PANAMA'S INTERESTS (SEE REFTEL), NO PANAMANIAN OFFICIAL HAS YET COMMENTED IN PUBLIC CONCERNING THE PROPOSAL. THE SUNDAY EDITION OF THE GOP-CONTROLLED EL PANAMA AMERICAN SPECULATED DECEMBER 23 THAT FOREIGN MINISTER TACK
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WAS EXPECTED TO MAKE A STATEMENT ON THE TOLL INCREASE ISSUE,

BUT THAT EFFORTS TO REACH HIM OR GET A STATEMENT FROM THE FOREIGN MINISTRY HAD NOT BEEN SUCCESSFUL DUE TO THE HOLIDAY WEEKEND.

3. ONE COLUMNIST EXPRESSED HIS SUSPICIONS THAT THE FOREIGN MINISTR* HAD NOT BEEN CONSULTED BEFORE THE BOARD TOOK ITS ACTION AND SAID THAT DURING A PERIOD OF CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS, IT WAS NOT A GOOD TIME TO RAISE TOLLS WITHOUT CONSULTING WITH PANAMA. THE AUTHOR SPECULATED THAT THE U.S. W*S JUST TRYING TO CAUSE PANAMA PROBLEMS W*TH OTHER CANAL USING COUNTRIES.

4. COMMENT. THE GOP APPEARS TO HAVE DECIDED, FOR THE TIME BEING AT LEAST, NOT TO EXPLOIT FOR PROPAGANDA PURPOSES ITS POSIT*ON EXPRESSED IN REFTEL. WE CAN PROBABLY EXPECT, HOWEVER, THAT WITHIN THE NEXT SIX MONTHS, THE GOP WILL DECIDE TO MAKE ITS VIEWS PUBLIC FOR THE RECORD.

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